

hard and you had to make these written-no, they weren't written either—they were exercises, but there was the association there with these other people. For instance, in our committee, one of them was Westover [Oscar Westover, USMA 1906]. He was Air Force or the Air Corps representative. He was with us and I got to know him very well. There were several others; Fenton [Chauncey L. Fenton, USMA 1904] was later head of the Chemistry Department at West Point. He was my next door neighbor when I lived in the same building. Those were good people. "Petey" Uhl [Frederick Elwood Uhl, USMA 1911] later became a corps commander. He had been a TAC when I was a cadet. He had one of the corps area commands [Service Commands during World War II]. That was the type of people that we became acquainted with, and we would learn something about their branch relations. I thought the instruction at Benning was far superior to the instruction at Leavenworth.

Fort Benning

Q: Did you go to the Infantry course, the Advance Course, at Benning?

A: No, but I taught there.

Q: Right, you've taught there.

A: But I thought their instruction was the best of any place in the Army. They had a wonderful group of instructors and they all became successful. General [George C.] Marshall was the main motive for that. He was assistant commandant of the Infantry School in those days, and he made the Infantry School. And he had all these wonderful people with him. He inspired, he inspired everybody. You did your best to work had.

Q: That was your assignment immediately after Leavenworth. You went to the Infantry School.

A: Yes, I didn't want to go, I wanted to do something else. I'd gotten tired of teaching school. I enjoyed it down there. It was all right, and I made some very good friends there while at Benning.

Q: You were either a student or teaching school from November 1919 through July 1931. You had almost 12 years in the academic atmosphere.

A: Well, I got out of it for a while.

Q: The Rock Island job was in that period.

A: The rest of it was all school and I was getting tired of schools. I wanted to do something else. But I was forced into it.

Q: You had a full three-year tour there. Was General Marshall there the entire time?

A: Yes, he was there.

Q: Well, that's interesting—your comparison with the level of instruction. I'm sure you were the instructor on the Engineer staff, the engineer committee there. Were you primarily associated with the basic course, or did they have a basic?

A: I taught all of them. I mean, I taught the basic, company, and advanced. But our engineering was limited. We only had a few classes throughout the year. Not much. We taught field fortifications as most of it. I had one assistant who taught map reading and sketching and that course, but he was an Infantry officer. I was the only Engineer officer on duty. I spent most of my time at Benning off on construction work. We had something they called a recreation center board. And the recreation center—I don't know where they got that name. We had no money in those days, and they were building all of the facilities—swimming pools, basketball courts, handball courts, baseball fields; everything was built with soldier labor. We built the children's school with soldier labor. We had no money whatsoever; and later I designed the present officers' club at Benning and got it started, but we didn't have much money. We had to use soldiers. I got enough together, but General Marshall called me in one day and said the club officer had absconded with all the club funds. I've forgotten how much, but he embezzled it all and deserted, left. We had the club in an old wooden barracks, and he was very much interested in getting a decent club there. So I designed most of the new club and

started it. I left there before much more than a foundation was in, and I went over to Vicksburg at that time. But we got it started. It's enlarged now, but it's essentially the same club that I designed.

Q: That's a beautiful club with that big ballroom there.

A: But we did that with soldier labor, and there is one thing our soldiers could build—arches. We built that stadium at Benning, too, with soldier labor. About the only thing they could do was build arches, and if you look at the design of that stadium, it was all arched fronts. So when we got started on this other, I had to cut my own lumber out in the woods. We had a Negro forestry company out there—a sawmill company sawing up trees—and I know when we put part of the roof on some of the children's school, it was so green the sap was running out. But that's all we had.

Q: I'll bet many of them are still standing. I know the officers' club and the stadium are still there.

A: Well, the children's school is still there. It's been enlarged, that is, one or two of them. The children's school used to be horrible. An old wooden shack. I was made school officer at Belvoir when I first went down there because Mrs. Hoge kicked about the school. Our son was then seven years old, I guess; and he had been to a good school up at Davenport, Iowa, a Catholic convent school in which he was a day pupil. He had had good instruction, but he went to Belvoir and they had one room with a potbellied stove in the middle of it. One teacher taught seven classes, all of them. And it was awful. But she raised hell with the commanding officer at Belvoir about that.

Q: Belvoir or Benning?

A: Belvoir. And he said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do, Mrs. Hoge, I'll appoint Hoge school officer." So I caught it. But I did build up the school and I hired a teacher. I had great difficulty getting any money. I made a tax. That's the only time I know of I got a tax through on post personnel which was entirely voluntary. I taxed everybody that lived in a big set of quarters a dollar a month. I charged everybody that lived in

a smaller set of officers' quarters 50 cents a month, and all the noncommissioned officers who had public quarters were charged 25 cents a month. So that way I got about \$100 a month, and then I got permission from the moving picture industry of Army motion pictures to give me one movie a month which was free. I mean it was given to me. I took all the profits. They'd sell the tickets and I got the take. I made about \$100 a month off of that. We struggled along with that—I got a couple of teachers and we needed some more money. Then I found out the state of Virginia was collecting a Virginia tax on all people, children at Fort Belvoir, but weren't giving us a penny. So, I went after that and I got that money; I got enough to run the school. I had about four teachers.

Q: Let's see, that was at Belvoir. What time frame was that? That was 1924 to 1927 when you instructed at the Engineer School. It was Fort Humphreys then, not Fort Belvoir?

A: You had to do it. There was no money. The Army wasn't giving us any money. We got no money for teaching school children. They were charging a proportionate part of the school for this one-room school, and it was costing \$7.50 per month per pupil. I know there was the bandmaster at Belvoir at that time who had seven children, and he couldn't possibly pay it. So he had to send his children into a parochial school in town where he could get it cheaper or free. But they had to go into Alexandria to be educated. They couldn't afford to pay much.

Q: That was a long trip then, I imagine, from Belvoir to Alexandria?

A: It was a long trip. The bus service was very poor and erratic.

Q: Well, that experience in running a school system helped when you got down to Benning to build a school.

A: What was the foundation of the Sears Roebuck Company? A fellow named Rosenthal or something like that. He was a big philanthropist and he was giving money to schools around the country. He didn't give us any, but he was doing it and he had some designs for schools. I got one of those plans, and on that basis we built this school. They [the troops]

could do everything but lay bricks. We had to hire a civilian in town to come out and lay the brick. My soldiers were not very expert. They'd just work hard, that's all. They could make concrete and they could pour arches.

Q: Well, let's see-more on the Benning job. Up to this time all your assignments had been school or Engineer oriented. While you were at Benning and associated mostly with the Infantry, did you have any second thoughts then about desiring to be in a combat arm? Of course this was a peacetime Army at that time.

A: No, I didn't particularly. I wanted to find out something about the Corps of Engineers somewhere or other. And I'd had a very poor experience and very little bit. Mrs. Hoge wanted me to transfer to the Infantry or something else, but I never thought seriously about it. The great inspiration there was the association with General Marshall and the other officers who were there—Bradley [Omar N. Bradley, USMA 1915], Collins [J. Lawton Collins, USMA April 1917], Ridgway [Matthew B. Ridgway, USMA April 1917], they were all instructors. I've forgotten, there's a list there as long as your arm. All the people became either Army commanders or corps commanders or division commanders.

Q: They were all instructors there during that time frame?

A: Yes, it was a great group and Marshall inspired them. We did a great deal of riding down there. Rode at a hunt, several hunts. We had fox hunts, wildcat hunts, pig hunts on Sundays, and we rode a lot just for pleasure. Then we always had horse shows. Most of the time I spent there was doing riding and this recreation center work. Actually I got very little other experience.

Q: Sounds like you got more construction experience there than you had in the previous district job. Were most of the other instructors there at the time—Ridgway and Collins—were they all majors also at that time?

A: No, captains, I guess. I'm not sure whether they were captains or majors. See, my class had gotten ahead of these others.

Q: Oh, that's when you went to France.

A: Well, no, but then the class after 1916, they cut off promotions down there. The hump came in after the First World War. They took in all these civilian officers-nonregular troops—and they came in and got ahead of this group. So a great many of those classes were behind the hump, and they were stopped ten or twelve years before promotion.

Q: You were a major for 16 years after you made it the second time. Actually you were promoted to major in August of 1918, promoted to lieutenant colonel in August of 1937. So while you were at Benning you were a major, and I guess at that time you still had a lot of service. Staying in one grade for a long time, did you think about that very much?

A: No, the rest of the Army was the same, or worse off.

Q: Everybody else was the same.

A: Everybody. We were all hard up for money and it was terrible trying to make ends meet. I would wind up every month—if I'd had \$5.00 left from the previous month when the last day came—payday came—I was lucky. And you charged everything at the commissary or someplace so that you got it paid on your cuff. We didn't have anything.

Q: I imagine those were hard times, but we're talking about the 1930s, when nobody had any money.

A: Yes, I'm talking about the 1920s and the 1930s.

Q: That wouldn't have been a good time to give much consideration to getting out because there wasn't much going on anywhere else.

A: I was lucky. During the Depression I know we got a tremendous number of people in the Corps of Engineers who were excellent engineers and had good jobs but were out [of work] in civil life completely, and they hired them as engineers in the Corps, civilian engineers; and they were a fine class of people but they had earned much more money than that. There

was a fellow who was graduated from Annapolis who resigned from the Army, I mean the Navy, named Smith. He worked for Raymond Pile Company and made a lot of money, but he was out of a job. So he had come to Memphis and he came in as an engineer. I think that was his grade. And he was very happy he had it. He was a crackerjack man. He later got out of the Engineers after things got better and-no, he didn't, he went to the War Department after that. I've forgotten what all he did. I had correspondence with him for several years, but I've lost track of him. I don't know where he is now.

Q: I guess during those times there at Benning and, well prior to that, too, during the Depression, things were sort of hard. Did you find that for recreational activity you did more with the other officers; you had more pot-luck-dinner-type things or were just getting with the other officers for talks and so forth?

A: Entirely, that plus our riding, and we did some hunting; there wasn't much fishing. But we did hunt quail and turkey and things like that.

Q: This probably gave you a better opportunity actually to get to know them as individuals?

A: Well, many of them I'd known, of course, at West Point. Joe Collins and Ridgway and in that group I'd known Bradley. Bradley lived just two doors from me.

Q: Oh, he was there, too, at the same time that you were there?

A: He was teaching.

Q: Was he a captain at that time?

A: I guess so, a captain or major. I'm not sure what he was.

Q: Was there much rank distinction among you since your class jumped ahead?

A: No. A lieutenant colonel or something like that had quite a distinction.

Q: How about the young officers that you had at that time; this was 1928 to 1931 at the height of the Depression. Did you have better people coming into the Army at the time that you were training at Benning as a result of the hard times?

A: No, we didn't. Those people had come in before—most of them. But you didn't go to Benning until you had several years of service and then the Company Officer's class. I don't know whether we still had the basic or not. They cut the basic out after a while, and I've forgotten when they stopped the basic. It was sometime previous to that. But we had the Company Officer's class and the Advance class. Those officers all had had eight or ten years' service. They had been through World War I. They were getting along in years. But I don't remember any new ones coming in. Of course, I had nothing in the Engineering line because there was only one company of Engineers on duty there at Benning and that was commanded by Captain [William F.] Heavey, who later became a brigadier general. I didn't have much to do with them except watch them while they put on a demonstration—putting up wire or something like that.

Q: For the classes?

A: And putting in float equipment. Several times we put on a bridging operation over the Chattahoochee River, and we had to send over assault boats and put over pontoon bridges and send over the infantry and later artillery and what not.

Q: Did you have much friendly interbranch rivalry there at Benning?

A: No. It was almost all Infantry. We only had the instructors, There was a battalion of Field Artillery there and two regiments of Infantry on duty there. There was, of course, a company of tanks. Tanks couldn't go across the parade ground without breaking down. They were all World War I French tanks. So there wasn't a great deal of competition. Actually there was a Cavalry instructor there, and they had a pretty good stable and paid a lot of attention to riding.

Q: What would you say was the Army's biggest problem from your perception from the Infantry School at that time, besides not having money? Or I guess that would be the biggest problem.

A: I don't know. They had one—quarters were very scarce. Many officers built their own quarters out of any old lumber they could salvage or anything else. They'd build their own fireplaces and anything else. They had them scattered all over Benning. And they later established some way you could get something out of them by selling—couldn't sell the land, you could sell the house. You did own the house, and when somebody would move away he could sell his shack to somebody else. We lived in permanent quarters. We had some of those old brick quarters but there were very few of those. There were a couple of rows in one circle of brick houses which had been built, I've forgotten when. Once the appropriation of a few years before—before that the appropriation for construction of houses was to run out and they had to get them started before the fiscal year and they didn't have any plans. So somebody sent a set of plans for officers' quarters from Washington that were designed for Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont, and that was all they had and they built all those sets. There must have been a hundred of them in all built from those plans. They were hot as heck, but it was a house and it had a couple of bathrooms in it and a heating plant and so on. It was all right.

Q: Must have been well insulated to have been designed for Vermont and built in Benning.

A: They had roofs that just went right up to a point, you know.

Q: Yes, sir, I've seen some of those quarters.

A: To shed the snow.

Mississippi River Commission

Q: Now let's see—after Benning, you had a little over a year with another district assignment in Vicksburg.